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ABSTRACT

The primary functions of a teachers' center and the qualities to look for in individuals who will form the core staff are delineated. Three main tasks for a teacher center are: improving instruction in the classroom; bringing people together to effect the improvement; and coping with the complexities of change in people and institutions that the focus on the classroom and cooperation entails. The prime task of the core staff is discernment of needs. A person who is able to see a situation clearly and be sensitive to group interrelationships is needed. Such a staff member must discern the complexities of what people need in order to improve instruction. A program organizer who can spot potential, encourage and support it, and help people to enlarge their knowledge and skills and hone their ability to share them is essential to a core staff member. Ability to communicate clearly is important, as is the ability to design and operate a curriculum resource area. The core staff should be able to locate and recruit interesting and challenging outside resource persons. (JD)

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STAFFING A TEACHERS' CENTER—

A Joint Venture in Growth and Change

By Christine San José

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Purposes of a Teachers' Center

If an organization is to be staffed effectively, those responsible for selecting the staff must surely first of all have some perception of the basic purposes of the organization. Next they will ponder the manner in which they hope the organization will go about its business, since the way in which things get done is rarely separable from the net result.

Can we assume that most people faced with staffing a teachers' center do in fact have these perceptions? Obviously they have an idea of the characteristics that attracted them to *"centering."* The apparent opportunity for teachers' self-determination of their continuing education is probably the main one. Besides that, the connotations of unboring activity and of cooperation are of real help for the classroom. Further, many accounts of centers are redolent with commitment and caring, a sense of worth in the job and the people. There is little doubt that teachers' centers have attracted both as organizers and as participants a high proportion of professionals who are energetic, resourceful, self-reliant, resilient, collegial, sharing, unpompous, unjaded, and more, presenting an image with which very many of us would like to be associated. Whether these lively people created the centers we get to know about or the centers created the liveliness is another matter; the fact remains that we glimpse the set-ups and would like one of our own. Also, the literature of inservice programs (e.g., the Rand Corporation's change agent studies and the writings of Gordon Lawrence) confirms our own experience and intuition that more comprehensive teacher participation results in more effective inservice. A teachers' center can be a viable vehicle for organizing this participation right within the schools.

Do these impressions add up to a rounded perception of the basic purposes of a center, and suggest a constructive approach to founding one? Perhaps not precisely enough to furnish practical guide-

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Teachers' Center

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lines. I suspect that many governing groups of prospective centers, faced with selecting a staff that will bring their center to life, find themselves guided by not very much more than a list of goals that somehow don't add up to the whole intent.

Obviously, purposes will very properly vary in many ways from one center to another. Further, not only do the selectors of a staff have to make up their own minds, they also have to be flexible—not only at the outset while they're balancing their demands against the supply of staff available, but also throughout, as their new venture finds its own shape. However, out of my own experience of directing a teachers' center and my observation of others, I have come to see three main, interrelated tasks that a center must tackle if it is to promote improvement in the schools. It is the centers whose staff are tackling these that are the lively, effective units we recognize as worth emulating. The three tasks, each of which I shall discuss in turn, together with its implications for staffing, are: first, improving instruction in the classroom; second, bringing people together to effect the improvement; and third, coping with the complexities of change in people and institutions that the focus on the classroom and cooperation entails.

Improving Instruction in the Classroom

As we pursue improvement in the classroom, we shall frequently find that we have to look beyond, to school climate for example, or to support from the home, if lasting gains are to be made. But the starting point is the teacher on the job. Today teachers are demanding of those who supposedly have the mental and material resources to make it happen, "Help me be a better teacher, here where it counts, in the classroom." For once we hear what the teachers are saying, since it articulates with the taxpayers' demand for visible returns on their ever increasing outlay.

Interpreting this request, and meeting it, is the teachers' center's aim. Easily said, but consider that the center is required to listen to people who traditionally have not been listened to; who have hardly in fact spoken out; who indeed have received very little training in analyzing what their needs may be. It must then locate and assemble resources, perhaps from widespread sources, and organize them into attractive programs drawing teachers to the center.

This gives us our first clue to center staffing. Broadly, someone has to be close enough to the classroom to help interpret needs, while the range of available resource personnel has to be wide and varied. This suggests a small core of center staff, with most of the funds then available for contracting consultant help as needed. However fine a team of regular consultants might be assembled, they are unlikely to be capable of optimal response to all priorities at all times. Regular full-time salaries eat voraciously into funds, and it is by keeping them to a minimum that most successful centers have maintained their flexibility.

Having distinguished our two main groups, the core staff and the contracted consultants, we can now delineate both more finely.

Needs Discernment

The prime task of the core staff is discernment of needs. Obviously, bringing about the fulfillment of those needs is very important, but is nonetheless secondary. In a small center, the same person will basically do both jobs. A larger center can operate as a clearinghouse for resources—building a rich file of effective consultants as well as stockpiling helpful materials, making the contacts and contracts—and generally offering both persons and goods as, when, and where needed, in the most appropriate combinations. But however extensive the operation, there can be no managerial shortcuts to effective discernment of needs. Whoever is responsible must learn which are the most perceptive voices to listen to in the bailiwick, and will enlist those people as extensions of the center's ever open eyes and ears. Some use can also be made of more formal

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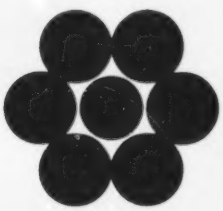
needs assessment instruments, the various lists and procedures available. However, nothing can replace regular, relaxed personal contact for garnering insight into people's needs—especially for convincing people that their needs are important, and if articulated can probably be met.

When contact has been firmly established between center staff and users, it can to some extent be maintained by memo and telephone, provided these demonstrate center accessibility and prompt response; but the need for frequent face-to-face discussion never diminishes. In and out of classrooms and the teachers' rooms, participating in school faculty meetings, chatting in principals' offices and in district offices, keeping in touch with district administrative meetings, exchanging views



with parents, sharing news with teachers' associations, sitting in on school board meetings when significant decisions are to be made, lending a hand in the curriculum resource center, making oneself at home on campus, touching base frequently with all members of the center governing board—it is out of exchanges such as these that the web of teachers' needs becomes clear. To those embarking on centering it may seem extravagant to budget so much time for what is primarily listening. To a busy center staff member, it can seem after a day of meetings that the hours have whizzed by with nothing to show for them, while the paperwork piles ever higher. But listening is the crux of the job. Centers whose finances or size or organizational pattern impose strict limits on the amount of personal contact that can be made would do well to stretch those limits and find ways around them as best they can, such as squeezing money from elsewhere or dividing up territory. Efficient cross-section sampling, or careful establishment of needs assessment sub-area by sub-area might be tried but they are decidedly second best.

Although we are looking at assessment of needs whose fulfillment is intended to make a difference in the classroom, we are already including (as we knew from the beginning) the needs of more than teachers. Many people play a part in how effectively children learn, and all of them need to further their skills to this end. However, though different elements in the needs of these many people can be surmised, premature focusing on differences too easily leads to fragmentation. Therefore we shall make little reference here to distinctions frequently found in the theoretical literature between "individual needs" and "institutional needs," or to such categories of inservice as those currently termed "job-related," "job-embedded," "personally-related," and so on. I am not convinced that these categorizations are based on meaningful distinctions. In my experience these simplistic abstractions do not catch the shape of reality. I am convinced that the task of the center is first and foremost to look at the reality of classrooms and ponder on what can be done to enrich, develop, and improve what is going on. Those enjoined with this responsibility will very soon perceive that virtually every situation involves many people in complex relationships, people interacting both as professionals playing diverse roles and as persons. Effective help will take account of the situation in its totality and subtleties. With this approach, we shall perhaps the more readily achieve integration of personal and professional goals, for example, or of work for career advancement and work for improved performance on the job.

WHO CAN DO IT? What sort of person is most likely to discern needs . . . and who has had this kind of prior experience? We are looking for qualities not normally sought in selecting staff for schools, and we seem to need various characteristics that are not necessarily found together. First, someone has to see a situation clearly, the roles played by people in that situation, and the people behind the roles. Second, he or she then has to perceive how the situation looks to the people in it. It is only with these two views in mind that, third, it is possible to help people to a further step along a path appropriate to them personally. Of course not all assessment of needs calls for creative sensitivity. Often enough, individuals, schools, districts, or whoever is concerned will have a good idea of what they want in order to further the improvement of instruction, and a center can work diligently to promote such

self-assessment and expression of wants. But further, what distinguishes the operation of a good teachers' center is careful attention to not only obvious needs but also underlying needs, resulting in facilitation of a step forward in line with the growth of the individual or the institution, rather than imposing someone else's notion of what should be done. It's fairly easy to walk in and tell someone what to do. It's not too difficult to listen to a problem and say what you would do. To listen to people and then help them think through what is the next best step for them, that is an extraordinarily demanding way to work!

People with this blend of receptivity and problem-solving skills are not in great supply, but a teachers' center governing group would do well to persist in their search for one or more persons of this kind to be the heart of their operation, most especially if

the center is just starting and must establish its character. As for what guise these persons will come in, I won't even hazard a guess. A high proportion of the most effective teachers' center leaders I have met, all of them notably receptive and creative, have had experience in various aspects of education, including a stint in the classroom, and in addition have had responsibility of a different kind, frequently outside education, for example in business, social work, television, or publishing. Many of the effective center leaders are women who have spent much time running a house and raising a family, often with experience in community work. Of course there are notable exceptions, and anyway just because one available group of persons has proved a rich source does not eliminate others with different experiences. In a small operation, where our receptive/creative paragon is running the show virtually single-handed, he or she will also have to be able to handle the tasks we shall be looking at later. But without the receptive/creative element as a foundation, the superstructure is in jeopardy.

Two points to bear in mind during the interview with a job seeker. First, the creativity we are looking for is not a barrage of bright ideas. Rather, it is a thoughtful, free-ranging exploration of possibilities and a search for the constructive match of a particular person with another particular person or study or action—the kind of imagination that goes out to understand from different points of view. Second, the kind of person to whom others will open up appears (at least) friendly, relaxed, genuine . . . but if the listening is to result in constructive action, then (as one soon becomes aware among effective teachers' center workers) beneath the heart of gold is a canny intelligence.

Different centers will have different emphases, looking for staff (who will be responsible for needs discernment) with a strong classroom background, or perhaps with a strong theoretical grasp. That is for them to decide. Different centers will probably peg the job at different levels, from classroom teacher through different administrative grades. No matter: as has been stated, the essential characteristics are found in people with widely varying experience. Besides, if they are really good at discerning needs, they will discern even their own, and make good their deficiencies. As for the "status" level at which potential center staff are found, that again varies enormously. I have known teachers not long out of college that I would rather trust with the job than some high-ranking school-district officers or professors of education, but I've also known principals and professors who would be splendid. Personally, I would look for someone interested approximately equally in practice and theory. Obviously, the actualities of the classroom cannot be underestimated, but assessment of what they add up to, and what the next step might be, is invaluably enriched by theoretical knowledge. I would also peg the job fairly high, because it is demanding and carries considerable responsibility. Some people maintain that credibility with teachers is impaired if center staff are employed at a different level, but I have never found this to be true; rather, that long-term credibility rests on ability, enhanced by an honest acknowledgment of limitations. Also, as we have seen, the needs of many people besides teachers are involved, and the person working in the center is going to need credibility in many different quarters.

Many of the existing successful centers have been extremely fortunate in their staffing. The challenge and freedom of these largely voluntary, unorthodox ventures have attracted people of unusual ability who have not been interested in either the money or the rank involved. The type of person we have characterized as optimal teachers' center staff would

make a success of many endeavors. As centers become more common, there may well be competition for leadership of this caliber. It's worth paying the money if that's what it takes to get these people. What may be more difficult to come up with in institutions is the latitude these people need to do their best work. It's worth rewriting the rules—indeed, it's difficult to see how centers can prosper if we are not prepared to rewrite the rules. Further, chances are high that people like this won't be satisfied unless they themselves are learning and growing as they work, so there's no point in being less than totally honest, or in persuading them against their will, if the circumstances of the job do not in fact provide for responsibility and growth.

The basic premise of this section has been that those responsible for a teachers' center need above all to find staff able to discern the *complexities* of what people need in order to improve instruction. Efforts at improvement without focus on the whole context are unlikely to be any more efficacious than the gimmicky bandaids or irrelevant methodologies that teachers' centers are being formed to replace.

Some centers may envisage their core staff as more dependent agents of a governing council, or more strongly directed by various committees. My experience and observation of teachers' centers convince me that casting the center director's role that way—as mere coordinator of committees' explorations and decisions—will result in impotence. More progress is made with the services of someone prepared to make the most of his or her unique and comparatively independent position, take initiative, and accept responsibility—listening, seeking feedback, emending, genuinely making use of democratic machinery, yes—but also contributing much of his or her own.

Program Design

As the discernment of teachers' needs is infinitely more complex than administering a ready-made instrument, so the drawing up of plans to fulfill needs is infinitely more than delivery of training. By keeping what is actually happening in the schools ever in focus, and by recognizing always the diversity of people to be served, the patterns of program development begin to emerge.

What kind of person is needed to organize a center's program of instruction? Putting the program together will call for firsthand knowledge of resources available in the district—especially among teachers—and in the community, and ingenuity in using these resources. The general shape of the center's offerings is set during the needs assessment—by teachers' and others' requests and the center staff's interpretation of user needs. In a small center, the director or coordinator can delegate much of the actual organization (securing the instructors, fixing dates, informing interested parties, and other tasks) to a well-organized assistant, such as a secretary, intern, or graduate student. In a larger center, the subject area coordinators, the advisors who go out from the center into the schools, or other staff, whatever their function, can explain teachers' needs to a program organizer.

Program organizers are in the business of developing people's potential. They need to be able to spot potential, encourage and support it, and help people to enlarge their knowledge and skills and hone the ability to share them. The organizers must be willing to trust other center staff and users with responsibility. How the center's program functions is just as important as what it consists of. The *how* is what primarily conveys the center's message of response to needs; the center's attitude toward the worth of participants; its trust in their abilities; and its commitment to the profession of teaching.

A large number of participants in a program is not always the most crucial indicator of success. Center staff must keep an eye out for the people who will use the information and skills they learn—in the classroom, with their colleagues, to create a ripple throughout their schools. Leaders must then be open to constructive feedback from their core participants—the organizers can't be in love with their own programming.

Another desirable quality in center leaders is the ability to formulate a conceptual framework for the process of teaching. This may very well take the form of putting what goes on in the classroom at the heart of teachers' learning, and seeing how characteristics of teacher training, teacher style, pupil back-

ground, school climate, and other factors influence what goes on in the classroom. The ability to conceptualize teachers' learning provides a context for efforts at improvement; it helps discernment of underlying causes and effects; and it helps build concerted development, rather than devotion to one aspect of schooling and neglect of others, or scattering of refinements here and there.

To ensure the continuing effectiveness of the teachers' center program, core staff should possess ability in two other main areas: one is communication and the other is designing, provisioning, and operating a curriculum resource area.

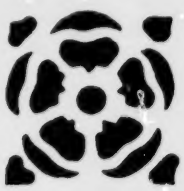
Communication, meaning constant personal contact, bringing people together, listening and talking as frankly as possible, we have already seen as vital to center operations. Equally vital are the center's written communications: memos, newsletters, flyers, notices of meetings, minutes of meetings, thank-you notes, idea sheets for teachers, calendars, schedules, internal and external reports, pictures in the local papers. Communications with the wider professional world, such as teachers presenting their action research at subject-area conferences, or staff comparing experiences with other centers and helping new centers on the way, are a source of stimulation, fresh ideas, counsel, and camaraderie.

The extent and content of the center's curriculum materials resource area and workplace for teachers will be determined in large part by the needs discernment process. But in advance of that the staff should stimulate teachers' requests by projecting some possibilities that teachers may not have imagined: a library of professional books and published curriculum materials, to be sure; audiovisual materials if these are not readily available elsewhere; raw materials, many of them scrounged, with which teachers can make lesson materials or classroom equipment; science and math materials devised from the natural environs, and social studies and language development ideas taken from the surrounding community; exemplary children's work that teachers bring in to share with their colleagues, along with lessons and learning activities teachers have devised. A talent for arranging space invitingly, for organizing diverse materials and managing the use of equipment—ingenious and tidy housekeeping traits—are indispensable in the staff of a center that decides to offer teachers a workplace and resource depot. In these invitingly relaxing spaces and amidst purposeful and stimulating activities, the staff in informal conversations with teachers will uncover their most deeply felt needs and provide counsel and opportunities for problem solving and sharing.

RESEARCH. Besides needs discernment, communication, and resource management, the core staff should possess some ability to do research. Much research in education has until now proved unsatisfactory both as pure and as applied study. Even within the usually minute fragments selected as the field of study, often enough wrenched out of context, the innate complexities of the fragment itself are commonly disregarded in the interest of methodological procedure. The net result is that teachers do not value either the data per se or understand the possible application of many of the findings. If their questions are to be significant and their data sufficient, researchers need the practitioners; if practitioners are to move forward intelligently, they need the answers to questions that the researchers can help them refine and then explore. It seems to me that teachers' centers, by bringing together diverse people to focus on the teaching-learning proc-

ess, could well furnish ideal circumstances for the growth of significant research. Centers that assume responsibility for long-term instructional improvement should certainly budget for research. Large centers would do well to assign a core staff member with at least half-time responsibility to carry out research with teachers, interpret findings, and help school people acquire research skills. In a smaller center, unable to afford this regular outlay, research might be contracted in the different areas as appropriate at different times; but to ensure pertinence and development, a core staff member should have ongoing responsibility, working continually with field practitioners as colleagues. It is not enough to decide periodically that a research effort is due, and call in the experts to do their thing. The research has to be an integral part of professional growth in practice.

All of these jobs, then, have to be accomplished by the core staff of a teachers' center. For most of the work, the selectors of staff will obviously be on the lookout for the intelligence, practical experience, initiative, flexibility, organization, spoken and written effectiveness, and so on that are the desirable basics for almost any job in education. A special skill they may choose to look for as they build their team is some interest in and familiarity with research. But above all, the center needs staff who understand people and situations in their infinite and shifting complexities. If any of the staff have special content area knowledge and experience, so much the better, and they will likely have plenty of opportunities to keep their hands in; but essentially they will spend their time facilitating the growth, and circulating the skills and wisdom of others.



JOB DESCRIPTIONS. The governing council might wish to draw up job descriptions for the different core staff; but since they are looking for rather special people, they would do well to keep the descriptions flexible, to make sure that they can use the unique talents of available people that they would like to employ, especially if they are building a team.

Additionally, some thought might be given to how long the selectors would like a core staff member to stay on the job. It appears to take at least three years for a center to establish itself, so a beginning center should look for some stability during that time. More than that is probably unreasonable to hope for. To a beginning center, the most attractive candidates will probably be those people who enjoy a challenge. If the center still has a lot of new ground to conquer after three years, they may well stay; but if not, the more competently they have done their job and have established the center as it is likely to remain, the more likely they are to move on to other things.

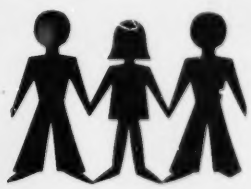
All in all, a center governing council will doubtless recognize that the success of their endeavor depends to a very large extent on the efficacy of their core staff. They need very good people—and very good people exist, but they take some finding and keeping. Once these people have been found, a wise governing council will take care to provide them with efficient and amiable secretarial help which will free them to use their talents, and will contribute to the center's hospitable ambience.

CONTRACTED CONSULTANTS. So much for the core staff. Among the staff who will be contracted for as appropriate to help meet needs, many will be teachers. They will frequently need time and perhaps help to develop what they have to offer—moral support, encouragement, not to say arm-twisting! It is extraordinary how many fine teachers, often known and respected throughout their school system, will nevertheless be reluctant to make a presentation to any kind of group—*not* so much through stage fright, but because they don't realize how much they have to offer, and how helpful it will be to others. Fortunately, once the precedent has been established, it is enthusiastically followed.

Other contracted consultants may be widely recognized leaders in their areas of specialization, but they too may have to develop new approaches in the rather different circumstances engendered by teachers' active participation and increasing awareness of what their needs really are. Not, let it be noted, that the changes will necessarily entail a move towards the more practical. It is a mistake to suppose that, given more determination in their own education, teachers will call for more practical courses and eschew the theoretical, or that leaders of courses, workshops, discussion groups, working groups, and so on have to gain credibility through bettering classroom performance, or at least indicating direct classroom applicability of what they are teaching. Of course teachers enjoy a new idea that they can use tomorrow; but much more they appreciate a new understanding that gives them a firm foundation to work from, and helps them generate a wealth of their own new ideas. If a course purports to be of practical help and then it isn't, naturally there will be complaints that it needed to be more practical. This applies to most method courses, which may tend to come dressed up with generalizations and abstractions, but are fundamentally "how-to's." If a course deals with fundamental

principles and speculations, or takes these as its starting point, it will be appreciated by many practitioners. Further, the quality of work from students who are there because they really want to learn is high. Also, learners in a teachers' center are made more articulate than most graduate students by the center's climate of acknowledgment of the importance of their job and of them.

In short, an instructor or discussion leader who does not relish bright, committed, expressive learners had better not get caught up in center work. The people we found ourselves wanting back time after time were not the entertainers, the easygoing, the ones with the gimmicks and fads, but those who respected both their subject and our teacher participants and so made demands. The best instructors manage to squeeze time out of their busy schedules, because they are attracted and stimulated by the challenge of the center.



Bringing People Together to Effect Improvement

Teachers' centers that flourish are the meeting point of many different interests, wherein lies their strength. They interweave giving and taking, learning and teaching, with people often doing both at the same time as they work together. This collaborative aspect has been very important in the development of the teachers' center concept. Indeed the basic reason for centers has been to bring people together in a notoriously atomized profession, and to offer to teachers the support of parents and other citizens concerned about schooling.

Volunteers working in the center can immeasurably spread the staff resources. Teacher participants in the center form the first rank of potential volunteers. Other good people can be recruited from the community—they may be teens, parents, senior citizens, and they range equally wide in other characteristics. Some centers maintain that they would be unable to function without help of this kind. These people generate a reassuring sense of "*our* center," and are often invaluable links within the center and to the community beyond, both contributing funds of information and disseminating it.

Volunteer help is very fitting—people attracted by the center's lively gathering together of people who want to make a difference, and themselves in turn forwarding this image and reality. For all this, however, care must be taken that center operations never are, nor appear to be, less than thoroughly professional. Teacher's centers are unlikely to fulfill their potential unless they purvey more innovation, intuition, and individuality in personnel and procedures than are presently common in schools; they will therefore have to be especially certain that their foundations are sound and perceived as such.

The bringing together of quite different approaches and philosophies is especially stimulating: teachers of different schools and grade levels and specialties; teachers and parents; teachers and administrators; teachers and professors. Discovering the many similarities among colleagues and enjoying the solidarity are enormously cheering; but exploring the distinctions, committing oneself to frank exchange, learning to live with plurality—this is the great step forward, for oneself as a professional and surely for the schools.

Recognizing Diverse Expectations

For years the schools have been handed their rather grandiose charges by society, and administrators have put up a good show of undertaking them, while by and large it has been left to teachers to shoulder the responsibilities. The schools have been such a pool of not only huge, but diverse expectations, that perhaps they could never have functioned as well as they have if their real capabilities had been brought out into the open and debated. But today, societal values and societal demands upon the schools are in great flux and can no longer be taken for granted. Even more exacerbating to the jaun-

diced taxpayers are the soaring costs of schooling and what appear to be declines in student achievement. Schools will be subjected to increasing public scrutiny; "back to the basics" may well be only the first of a succession of demands. Surely then, it makes sense for those of us in education to get in touch with each other, to enter jointly in the discoveries and assessments of needs, to inform the public about the contradictions, complexities, and imponderables teachers face, and to gain citizens' understanding of how we are working towards improvement.

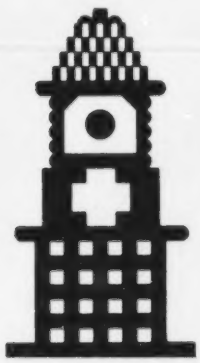
A teachers' center governing council committed to a collaborative approach will need center staff likewise committed. There are times when behavior that a staff member would do well to evince in order to obtain desired results will not necessarily reflect his or her true feelings. For instance, it is frequently constructive to appear relaxed, unhurried, and optimistic, thus inviting the sharing of hopes and anxieties, when in fact one is feeling uncomfortably hassled, rushed, and down. But the core staff's appearance of inviting and coordinating joint effort must go root deep. "Interpersonal skills" are not unimportant, but they are useless without the basic commitment. If the basic commitment is there—the will to understand differences and face them and live with them, the realization that confrontation as an attitude is more often than not a myopic indulgence—then the selectors do not need to look for polish on the interpersonal skills. Sincerity outweighs a great deal of charm.

Coping with Change

School systems have not traditionally focused on the classroom, following up with active attention to school climate, nor have the people within them traditionally worked closely together. It therefore becomes apparent that if teacners' centers are to achieve their goals, then their participants (these being seen both as people and as institutions) have to go about their work in ways quite different from those to which they have been accustomed. But in the past we have seen school systems resistant to change. The cynical might therefore assume that centers, like previous attempts at educational innovation, may well be successful among a limited number of people, for a limited period, but over a widespread range and time, will go the way of their predecessors.

Centers so far—certainly the centers we hear about, because they have predominantly good news to share—have been largely voluntary. Many people have contributed a great deal of time, energy, and expectation to joint efforts which they believe in. Many centers lead a chronically precarious life financially, and survive only if they have many returns to show for the expenditure. All of them, to my knowledge, flourish because of the outstanding contributions made by people who are motivated by the opportunity to attain not money or promotion or prestige, but rather an approach to teaching and learning they believe in. As was pointed out earlier, centers tend to have attracted lively, capable people who want to keep on growing in their profession. Those who initiate and staff centers in the first place are people of vision; those who then come to give and to take within this framework are very often those who are already good at what they are doing, but who have the perception, dedication, flexibility, self-confidence, and energy to want to improve, and improve schools. Realistically we have to question whether there is a limit in our profession to the number of people who (1) wish to take up a continuing challenge, and (2) will bring considerable capabilities to the task, because they (3) believe that by cooperative focus on the classroom with teachers, what goes on in schools can be improved, and (4) see a teachers' center as a particular way to achieve improvement. Looking back on some previous movements we can see that we should never

have expected them to be other than selectively effective. Maybe the same is true of teachers' centers. Certainly if people form organizational structures that they call "Teacher Centers" because that is a way of getting either funds or commendation for their supposed innovation or possibly some form of power, and have no real understanding of, and commitment to, the complex challenge of cooperative work towards improvement of what is actually going on in schools, these centers are not likely to survive, or if they do they are unlikely to prove effective.



Organizational Health

However this may be, looking at how successful centers function, and bearing in mind what we know about institutional change (as found for example in the writings of Matthew Miles about "organizational health"), it is possible to discern general characteristics of operation that nourish efforts at improvement. Securing and supporting staff who could generate this climate would set a center well on the way to success. In order to cope with change, then, centers need staff who will develop:

- communication among participants; maintaining a constant flow of information and opinion across levels and up and down hierarchies of authority;
- frank discussion of goals, and working out how to live with each other's goals, thus frequently promoting each other's goals symbiotically;
- people's promoting and accepting responsibility for self and own improvement; collaborative self-determination, not the giving and taking of orders;
- maximization of what everyone has to offer—both moral and practical support to this end;
- cohesion of effort;
- high morale, and actions that justify it;
- new ways of meeting needs and challenges;
- maintenance of the center's basic philosophy and integrity;
- constant openness to change and adaptations that may be called for:
- facing of problems, and cooperative problem solving.

In other words, successful centers work to forward those characteristics which we know to be essential to the health of an institution, and thus to its capacity for change.

A Final Note

To sum up, then, a teachers' center governing council needs to select core staff who can bring together a wide range of people to focus on improving what is actually happening in schools. As the staff works they will have to create a setting and activities in which school people dare to change. Such leaders are not easy to find, but they do exist, sometimes with unlikely backgrounds. They are worth searching for, are indeed essential to the effectiveness of a center. Once found, they will need a good deal of latitude if they are to do their best work. Provided the governing council has spent some time discussing the center's goals, they should be able to assess the suitability of a candidate best from an all-council

interview. Intelligence, experience in schools, imagination, organization, and commitment are to be desired, and the team needs someone with research ability of some kind, but above all the center requires someone who can listen to others and make them feel their needs are important, while also taking stock of the complex situation and devising diverse ways of meeting individual needs. (To candidates I would say, out of a collegial interest in their survival: do not even apply for the job unless you can rely on your sense of humor and your digestion!)

In conclusion, may I draw together what I find after four years experience to be my strongest convictions about centering. Both those faced with the staffing of a center and those considering becoming staff might care to match these against their own professional precepts, and note as they do the implications for the kind of program and the kind of climate they would like to establish as their joint endeavor, and therefore the kind of people they would like to see running it.

- There are the needs of many different people to be met, and each person has many needs—cognitive, affective, social. Some of the most important needs are psychological, obscure, and difficult to discern; these can cause fundamental problems in center operations if neglected, and tremendous gains if met.

- Both short-term and long-term needs are to be answered, but the latter are the foundation of continuing development, fitting into the general direction that the participants want to go.

- For all the plurality of needs to be met, for all the tremendous flexibility and variety of ways of meeting them, there will be some essentials of your program on which no compromise will be possible: quality of staff and participant commitment, and working through cooperation and consensus.

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- Centers are a good way of giving recognition to and making the most of, the fine people—by having them share and by presenting them with new challenges. It's nice to be able to work out extra rewards for them also.
- However, there's sometimes a temptation to be elitist—you get beautiful results working with the people who are pretty good already and come to the center for help in getting even better. But eventually you have to try to reach those who may not be doing too good a job, and perhaps aren't even aware of it.
- The greatest need of some people—many people—in our profession is to give. Do everything you can to make room for their contributions.

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